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Outcomes in Sending and Receiving Communities

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Social Responses to Migration among Rural Oaxacans: Outcomes in Sending and Receiving Communities

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Abstract

This paper uses primary data collected over the last six years in Oaxaca, Mexico as well as secondary resources to evaluate how rural Oaxacans from 13 central valley communities integrate migration with local socio-cultural practices and respond to the challenges of cross-border movement.

Migration studies often focus on the costs of movement and ask does migration destroy a cultural system? In this paper I use the example of rural migration from rural Oaxaca, Mexico to ask, why shouldn't movement be destructive? Or to put it more positively, why do we find examples of cultural renaissance and community maintenance in situations where we would expect migrants to leave with little reason to return or to support homes and communities they have left behind?

To answer these questions, I use the results of an ongoing study of thirteen communities located in the central valleys of Oaxaca, Mexico. This is a study that began in 1996 by surveying members of households (or domestic groups) concerning family organization, work, migration, agricultural production, and community participation. I model migration as a decision made by social actors who are aware of local traditions, the social costs and benefits of movement and who often have

conflicting wants, needs and desires.¹ I begin with an overview of Oaxaca, Mexico and the communities surveyed as well as the household model I have developed with Dennis Conway for the analysis of migration outcomes and remittance use (Cohen 2001; Conway and Cohen 1998). The central part of the paper examines networks and patterns of relations that rural Oaxacans use in both sending and receiving communities.

Oaxaca

Oaxaca (see figure 1) is a large, rural state in the south of Mexico. It is also a mountainous state, with environmental zones that are quite varied, from the semi-arid isthmus of Tehuantepec and the Pacific coast, to cloud forests that cling to mountains with peaks well over 2,000 meters. The state has a large indigenous presence, a history that reaches to the earliest of cultural traditions in Mesoamerica and a contemporary economy that is based largely on tourism (Acevedo and Restrepo 1991; Blanton, et al. 1999; Whitecotton 1977).

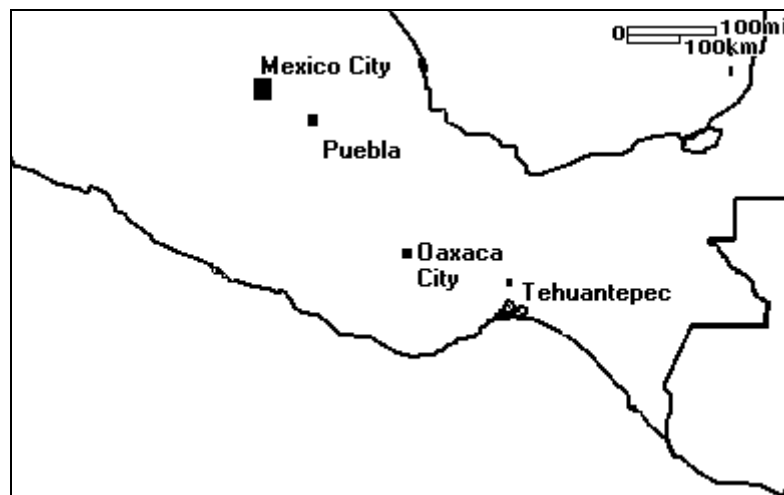


Figure 1: Oaxaca, Mexico

This study focuses on the three central valleys (Etla to the north, Tlacolula to the east and Ocotlan-Zimatlan to the south – see figure 2) that branch out from Oaxaca City, the state's capital. The three valleys are distinctive and each has its own unique history, ecology and ethnic background. However, they also share a number of attributes. *Municipios* (counties) in the central valleys have relatively better access to the state's urban center (Oaxaca City) and opportunities for education and wage labor than most other regions. These municipios have daily bus service to Oaxaca City and beyond, and all have become electrified at some point in the last twenty years. While subsistence based agriculture remains at the core of productive strategies in central valley communities, most of the municipios surveyed for this project specialize in a particular kind of production including crafts for international tourism or local sale and specialized dairy or agricultural production. The municipios also share migration histories that include local circuit moves to Oaxaca City, national migrations to coastal plantations, Mexico City and regional boomtowns (Tapachula, Chiapas for example),

and transnational movement to the U.S. that began the 1940s or 1950s, and has grown in importance since the mid-1980s.²

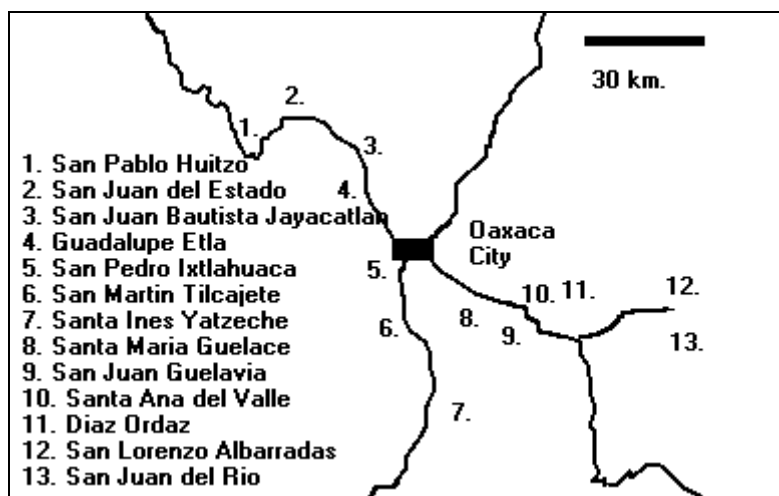


Figure 2: Central Valley locations surveyed for this study

Household Models of Migration

I model the decisions to migrate and use remittances as made by individuals who are members of households and communities. Individual choice and decision making are influenced by family social status and social networks, household structure and membership, as well as local economic opportunity, social practices and regional history (Conway and Cohen 1998:30; Warnes 1992). Once the decision to migrate is made in a rural household a series of secondary decisions occur concerning where the migrant will go, how long they will remain away and how best to use the remittances they will return.

Migration and remittance use are balanced against the activities, needs and earnings of those household members who remain in their sending communities. There are examples of households that cover nearly all of their expenses from the remittances of migrants with little or no locally earned incomes. Other households blend remittances with local wage and non-wage work to cover maintenance costs and limited expenses. Finally there are households that are able to use their remittances in concert with local wages to invest. Does the migrant hoard his or her earnings, perhaps turning a cold shoulder to sending households and communities? There is a range of possibilities, from migrants who have forsaken their households to migrants who toil for years in an effort to improve the lot of their siblings and children, or invest in community.

There are at least three factors that influence income flows and remittance rates for the rural Oaxacan household. First, there are the contributors to the welfare of the group. These are members of the household that provide monetary and non-monetary support and include migrants who remit, local wage earners, and those household members who participate in the reproduction of the household for little or no remuneration. This last group includes children who produce crafts with their parents but are not paid, sons who herd cattle, daughters that care for younger siblings among others. A second factor influencing outcomes are the internal and external resources that define economic power within the household and among households in the

community. Internal resources include the abilities and experiences of the household's members, and material resources (land, animals, etc) and intangible resources (social network ties) available to those members (Gabayet and Lailson 1991; Hulshof 1991; Wilk 1991). Households with material resources as well as ties to other households and active in the social life of the village (participating in the community's civil or religious hierarchies) will have more options for the strategic use of remittances than the household that lack land with few social ties and must therefore struggle to feed young children.

Time allocations in the household are a third factor that influence the use of income and remittances. Rooted in the resource base of the household (the number of workers versus the number of consumers in the unit) is the internal allocation of time and labor available for economic activity and social reproduction. Labor allocation, internal and external resources, and contributions to the household's welfare shift through its growth and development (Fortes 1971; Wilk 1989). Therefore, decisions concerning migrations and remittance uses also change through time and include fixed as well as flexible costs. Fixed costs occur over the life of the household and include the costs of its maintenance and reproduction as well as those costs that are demanded by the community (community services such as *tequio*-communal labor, *cooperación*-collection of funds, and *servicio*-service in civil society and government). Flexible costs are the expenses that a household elects to cover and includes educational costs for children, health care, spending on leisure, saving, land purchases, home construction, small business start up and self employment among others.

While the rate of movement between Oaxaca and the U.S. remains low compared to more traditional sending areas,³ there are certain patterns in Oaxacan migration and remittance investments strategies that are similar to those found in central and western Mexico (see Bustamante, et al., 1998; Massey, et al., 1994). Like Mexicans from north and western regions, first time migrants from Oaxaca are typically young adult men. They are recently married, planning weddings, or covering the expenses of newly born children as they establish new households. While migrants range in age from the young to the elderly (one family had a 16 year old son in the U.S. while in a second a husband and wife in their mid-60s had recently made their first trip to the U.S.), most migrants are in their mid 20s at the time of their first trips.⁴

Young, first time migrants and migrants who are organizing their households share common plans for remittances; with the majority citing the need to cover family expenses as the key reason to migrate. Remittances from these men and women are earmarked to cover the expenses of weddings, the initial construction of new homes and, most often, the daily reproduction of the household. The evidence of remittance use is obvious in the materials that are bought over time by wives as they wait for their husbands to return to the community. The finished (and often unfinished) homes are also obvious, made of brick, with second stories and multiple rooms in place of the more traditional adobe and cane structures.

Older migrants who no longer support children, or whose children are active in the economic and social reproduction of the household, can potentially move earnings into small-scale businesses, land purchases and luxury purchases. The range of investments made by rural Oaxacans are quite diverse. *Yuntas* (teams of oxen) are sometimes bought with remittances. *Yuntas* can cost thousands of dollars, but can be a good

investment. In many towns a team can earn on average 500 pesos (approximately 50 dollars) a day for clearing and plowing and a little less for hauling crops and grain home from fields.

Households in San Martin use remittances to cover the expenses of craft production and increase their presence in the tourist economy. In Guadalupe Etla a series of households use funds from migrants to purchase dairy cows and to move into milk and cheese production. In nearly every town we also found households that use savings from the U.S. to purchase vehicles and move into the transportation industry as *taxistas* (taxi operators). Finally, many households open small *tiendas* (stores) and convert their savings into dry goods. This is not necessarily a money making proposition for the households, however, it does convert liquid assets into goods that can hold value.

The non-monetary contributions by children and non-migrating adults (typically women) to the household's success during a migrant's sojourns affect the outcomes of remittance investment strategies. Households with "stay-at-home" workers and perhaps a few older children have more options for the strategic investment of their remittances. In many cases, older children (typically older sons) will migrate to the United States in support of their families. The funds they remit are pooled with local earnings and the entire sum is used to cover household maintenance, the education of other children and business. Crucial here is the work of women, who often support households when their husbands and children migrate. Women will often produce tortillas or participate in domestic labor to earn the money necessary to cover the daily costs of living. *Tortilleras* (women who make tortillas) can earn a reasonable income (up to \$10.00 a day) selling tortillas (Cook 1990; Cook and Binford 1990).

Far from the homogeneous indigenous communities one might expect, there is a great deal of diversity in the work people do, and how that work is balanced with decisions to migrate or remain at home. There are two groups of non-migrating households in these communities, the first are households that cannot afford the costs of migration for one reason or another. These are often households with little or no land resources, they are smaller units and typically have fewer working aged members, or members with health problems that tend to drain resources. The second are those households that own enough land or earn enough from profitable businesses and careers that they do not need to migrate. Such households were typical in Guadalupe Etla, where many families are able to earn a comfortable living by producing milk and cheese for a local dairy cooperative.

Households that include migration in their strategies for survival range from those that tend to pool their resources to those in which members hoard resources. The decisions to migrate and to remit are bundled with other economic and non-economic choices that reach beyond the bounds of the household and include the participation in the social life of the community. Pooling households use the experiences gained during transnational migration and the strategic investment of remittances establish economic, social and cultural resources available to sustain themselves and enhance their locally defined status through time (and see Grimes 1998; Hirabayashi 1993; Kearney 1996; Kemper 1977; Paerregaard 1997). These social, economic and cultural resources are a foundation upon which cooperation and competition between local households (over social status and standing for example) is organized and through

which the community is maintained and reproduced (Cohen 1999; Smith 1998; Watanabe 1992).

Households whose members invest their time, energy and resources (economic and social) into the maintenance and reproduction of self, household and community create dynamic social networks and resources that cut across kin and non-kin ties to reach distant friends and relatives living in receiving communities in the United States (Alvarez and Collier 1994; Brown and Connell 1994; Durand, et al. 1996; Massey 1990; Wilk 1989; Zolniski 2001). On the other hand, households whose members hoard and limit or neglect their investments in the community will watch their support networks decline even as their economic status rises (Guidi, 1993; Reichert, 1982; Rubenstein, 1992).

Rural Oaxacan households (from low-status to high-status and poor to wealthy) participate in a range of possible combinations of resource pooling and community investment. However, the decisions to pool or to hoard, to invest in community or not, can create situations that are difficult to escape. The migrant who leaves the household, hoards resources and makes decisions independent of other family members typically limits the strength and viability of their social networks. More common are those households that effectively pool their resources for their own maintenance and to support of the community. The majority of households pool successfully and are active in the social life of the village.

Social Responses to Migration

I have argued that the decision to migrate is collective and influenced by the networks, experiences and resources that are available to household members as they move. In this section, I focus on the how networks work in sending communities, receiving communities and in the transnational space in which they exist.

Migrants from households that pool and invest in the community know that their efforts will be rewarded in the maintenance (or enhancement) of their family's status and in its continued support. These ties, between friends and among migrants) often mitigate some of the stresses that are involved with migration. For those members of the household who are left behind, the networks are a way to cover shortfalls in income and food.

For the migrants these networks are important supports for the household left behind. The difference these relationships make can be profound for the migrant. If he or she has friends or family in a receiving community, the costs and risks involved in their migration drop dramatically.⁵ Links in receiving communities are no less crucial. The networks an individual migrant is able find in the U.S. or other parts of Mexico are often key to finding work. Labor is often recruited through these networks as are housing, healthcare and social contacts. Additionally, the migrant knows that his or her successes as a migrant further enhance an individual as well as household status and become resources in and of themselves. Thus, migration becomes an avenue through which individuals gain prestige, but also through which the household is maintained and the community reproduced (see Goldring 1999; Hirabayashi 1994; Zolniski 2001).

Within communities, successful and/or wealthy households may send migrants to gain the resources necessary to invest in businesses as well as to maintain their home

and participate in a community's social life. Successful households participate in the life of the village and gain status because they choose to do so. Their members' interests lie in translating migratory success and local resources into prestige and status (Greenberg 1995; Thomas 1996:12). Important venues for public participation in the community are the support of fiestas and participation in the village's political and/or religious hierarchy (through *servicio* and what is typically described as the *Cargo* system). Many communities also maintain *Mayordomia* systems. These are family sponsored celebration typically held in honor of a Saint. Families are elected or volunteer to act as *Mayordomos* (sponsors) for a one-year period during which time they organize for an extended celebration. The celebration is organized through cooperative ties to other friends and families throughout the community and now to migrants living far a field. Often migrants will return for the celebration of a mayordomia. Other migrants will travel specifically to earn the money necessary to cover some of the costs of a mayordomia (Stephen 1991).

Typical for the region, the celebrations of mayordomias has changed since the 1960s. Santa Ana saw a decline in mayordomias from eight in 1950 to only two in the 1990s. Other communities, San Pablo Huitzo for example, have not seen a decline, but instead a shift in fiesta organization. In Huitzo, migrants living in Mexico City return to their home village yearly and typically cover at least a portion of the costs of the fiesta. Before the highway linked Oaxaca and Mexico City, Huitzo was a stop on the old rail line. Migrants in Mexico City would rent train cars, hire a priest and return to the village en masse for the mayordomia in January. Today, the highway makes movement even easier and Huitzeños hire a fleet of buses to caravan back to their village.

Other communities are reviving defunct mayordomias in response to limited growth in demand among local households to sponsor events. New kinds of celebrations are also taking place. Saints' day celebrations are transformed into community wide festivals. Households are asked to "donate" funds to support an event (some towns collect a head fee, others a per household fee). Nominally one family remains in control of the celebration, however, all of the households involved or invited tend to share the expense of the events. Finally, many communities have seen a rise in the celebration of family or life cycle events rather than communal fiestas. For example, *quinceñeras* (birthday parties when a young girl turns 15 years of age) are of growing importance (Stephen 1990). These celebrations, while based in familial events, often include hundreds of participants from throughout a town and these participants typically contribute money, time and goods to the celebration. Thus, while refocused on very personal kinds of events, the celebration tend to incorporate a community's population and reorganize cooperative relationships among households.

Local systems of government are also changing with the influence of migration among other global processes. Increasing migration can undermine local systems of government as able bodied workers remove themselves from their community for long periods of time (Bovenkerk 1982; Guidi 1993). This is an important concern particularly where migrants leave permanently or for long periods of time. However, transnational movement in the Oaxaca valley is cyclical. More importantly, most Oaxacan migrants average only one trip to the U.S., and few have made more than three trips. Sojourns to the U.S. are also relatively short and average between one and

two years. Finally, most Oaxacans delay second and third migrations, waiting from one to three years between trips. During these pauses, most Oaxacans serve in the community's political hierarchy. Thus, migrants regularly cycle in and out of the community and its civil/political systems.

Social ties to communities are complicated, particularly for the migrant who has left his or her family behind to seek work and success in the U.S. To remain in good standing within a community, households must contribute *cooperación* when asked, must participate in *tequio* and must serve in the political system of their town. Some migrants have begun to hire replacements to cover their *tequio* and service requirements while they are gone. In other cases, family members serve in place of a missing migrant. Older men are often found filling the cargos of their sons. Less typical, but perhaps more important in terms of change, are the growing number of women in each town who are serving in place of husbands who have left as migrants. In the past, few if any women served in formal service positions and *tequio* was also a realm ruled by men. At the present, women are organizing themselves for *tequio* and are moving into positions of communal leadership.

Surveys find that there are few households that have no record of service. Many of those households that do not participate have converted to a new faith (which creates problems that lay beyond the scope of this paper). Other non-participants are households headed by single mothers who are often absolved of their service requirements. Household heads serve on an average of five committees (mostly very low status committees) and there is no correlation between migration and community service. The age of the migrant is the factor that most influences cargo service. Younger men and women are more likely to serve on low status committees. But they are also more likely to serve on committees that are of direct interest to them such as school committees. Older community members often concentrate on higher status work, serving on high ranking cargos and committees that bring with them more expenses and demands on an individual's time.

Remittances serve to support committee work. And many household heads told me (or one of my fieldworkers) that they would not be able to fulfill their commitments to service without the support of their sons and daughters who remitted regularly. Remittances are supporting infrastructural development in every community surveyed in this project. There is a combination of factors involved here. Men working in construction are learning the skills necessary to enhance electrical grids and water systems in rural communities. More importantly, the money returned to rural towns makes it more feasible to cover the expenses of public work projects and building programs. Because credit in Mexico is very difficult to find, migration and remittances have become an effective way to organize the funds necessary to cover the costs of development. Robert Smith, working in Puebla, found a similar process as migrants in New York organized to construct a sewer system for their home community (Smith 1993; Smith 1998). In the Oaxaca valley we have found towns that are constructing sewer and water systems, expanding electrical grids, building playgrounds and investing in cultural centers and ecological programs. Santa Ana has organized a reservoir, San Juan del Estado is working on a reforestation project, while San Juan Guelavia, Santa Inez Yatzeche and San Martin have all been involved in major work projects to refurbish their town centers.

Changes are occurring outside of Oaxaca in receiving communities throughout Mexico and the U.S. where migrants are organizing in a variety of ways. In Mexico City, enclaves from Huitzo congregate in specific areas, work together and maintain the ritual calendars of their hometowns. The networks which often expand beyond a single sending community become important resources as new migrants look for homes, work and support (see discussion of *paisanazgo* in Hirabayashi 1993:111). In U.S. based migrant communities, social networks and community based programs create support that ranges from the immediate kinds of aid that is necessary at moments of crisis (illness and death) to the elaborate kinds of efforts that parallel sending community traditions (Saint's day celebrations and migrant clubs or associations) to new kinds of possibilities including labor recruitment.

Associations and networks are not restricted to migrant communities in southern California, the home to most Oaxacan migrants. Mountz and Wright (1996) document one community that has formed in Poughkeepsie, New York for Zapotec-speaking migrants from a single valley town.⁶ Migrants use kin ties to mitigate costs of border crossing and to find work as well as living spaces. Migrants also trade video tapes of fiestas at home as a way to "stay in touch," keep track of gossip and so forth. Finally, for these migrants their relationships are crucial when crises occur. Deaths often pull together the Poughkeepsie migrant community as they organize funds to send the body home for a proper burial.

Social networks and systems of association also create new opportunities for community building. In his work with the group *Raza Unida* (United Races), the journalist Sam Quinoñes (2001) documents how the organization of basketball teams and tournaments in the Los Angeles, California area helps Oaxacan migrants maintain a sense of identity and build bridges across ethnic and class divides. The teams he works with bring together friends and family in dynamic and new ways, as members become supporters of each other. The teams also break down divisions as Zapotecs, Mixtecs and other migrants meet as players in tournaments. Echoing the importance place of basketball in Oaxaca, tournaments are held around important dates, and teams with ties to various towns vie for money or sometimes even goats that are later eaten in *barbacoa* (barbeque).

Oaxacans in the U.S. and particularly in southern California have also organized politically (Zabin 1992). In the U.S., organizations like the FIOB (Frente Indígena de Oaxaqueño Binacional) pursue better treatment for Oaxacan migrants and bridge ethnic differences often bringing Zapotec, Mixtec and other minority populations together in new ways (FIOB 2001). Additionally, groups like FIOB have established newspapers (*El Oaxaqueño*), radio programs and a series of cultural events throughout the years that support the migrant community and make the transition to the U.S. culture somewhat easier. These groups also have a powerful effect at home where they canvas local leaders for support of migrant issues and place pressures on state leaders to improve social and economic development programs for rural regions. Perhaps the most significant sign of the strength held by these groups were the numerous visits by presidential candidates to southern California before the last elections (Nangengast, et al. 1992).

Community groups in the U.S. are also crucial to the continued development of rural Oaxaca. Funds from migrants are often directed to projects in rural communities.

Santañeros (from Santa Ana) organized to paint and refurbish their church. In San Martin migrants organized and helped pay the costs of covering the central plaza of the town. Migrant remittances directly fund projects to expand electrical grids and water systems. Indirectly, migrants bring new ways of looking at the world that can also generate change. In Diaz Ordaz, Guelavia and San Juan del Estado, migrants are pushing new models for development based in market capitalism. Families (although the number remains very small) are investing their savings into micro-economic businesses that include stores, contractors, taxi/shipping services, dairy production, brokers in the craft industry and telecommunications.

There are ways in which the efforts of migrants and stay-at-homes are coordinated to effectively create new spaces for the construction of community and identity. Many of the changes noted thus far have components that bridge the gap between sending and receiving communities. Rather than a setting where households and families are abandoned, in the examples from the central valleys, we find that many households use migration in concert with other efforts to create a better life for children, improve living standards and advance their community. In Santa Gertrudes (a town not surveyed for this investigation) a project has linked the fates of local children directly to the success of migrants. Each migrant is assessed an annual fee (currently around 200 pesos or about 20 dollars). These monies are put into a communal account that is used to purchase chickens that are distributed four times a year to households that have been left with a single female head. The chickens can be used for eggs or eaten; in any case, the household is supported in a project that links the efforts of migrants directly to the health and well being of their community. Thus, it makes little difference whether development projects are started in the U.S. or Mexico, what is crucial is the relationship that is made stronger.

Social and cultural connections are also crucial as demographic shifts in sending communities age rural Oaxacan settlements and move young Oaxacans to sites in the U.S. An example of this process is the marriage of two young Oaxacans who returned to their community from the U.S. for the ceremony. Not exceptional until one notes that both bride and groom were born in the U.S. to naturalized aliens. Neither child had lived in Oaxaca for an extended period, but the links to their (or literally their parent's) homeland was strong enough to bring them to their "natal" village for the wedding. Today, they have two homes, one built by relatives in Oaxaca and a second in Santa Monica.

Given the advantages noted above, we cannot ignore the costs of migration. Most obvious among these is the pressure migration places on those who are left behind – children, spouses and parents. In each community the empty houses built by migrants or their parents are a testimony to missing children and each community we learned about abandoned families and "missing" children. Some of the "missing" have fled abusive relationships in their homes (Howell 1999). However, this is a small portion of the population. More typical are the migrants who have left with the intent to return, but have elected to remain in Mexico or the U.S.

A related phenomenon is the continued loss of the able bodied to migration and shifts in the local population structure of these villages. Rural communities in Oaxaca are losing the ability to maintain agricultural production. What is happening is an exodus from the farmland as governmental programs and wage labor in northern

Mexico and the U.S. draw workers away from their natal homes. One of the regular problems described, particularly by the elderly in every community, was the decline in agricultural production. Households are moving away from farming and turning toward wage labor.

In towns close to Oaxaca City, like Guadalupe Etla and San Pablo Ixtlahuaca, the decline in agricultural production has occurred as land speculation rises. These shifts are creating fundamental changes in community organization in a number of ways. First, as land moves out of production, self-sufficiency is reduced, and a dependence on externally produced goods increases. There is an ongoing debate as to the importance of family farming in Mexico. From a formal economic perspective, family farming of small plots (and the average in these communities is just over one hectare of land) is an ineffective tool for growth and development and remains labor intensive. However, from a household perspective, where there are few local opportunities for work, small-scale agriculture often makes sense. In the towns surveyed in this study it is typical for most families to grow from $\frac{1}{2}$ to all, and sometimes more than enough, corn for use during the year. That is, most households have the land to grow enough corn to feed a family tortillas throughout the year. What becomes a challenge for rural households is how to grow corn when fathers and sons are away. A very few families elect to pay others to plant their fields. Others turn to familial support and ask relatives to plant and harvest crops in exchange for a portion of the harvest. Still others let their land lay fallow and buy corn among other things on the open market. Of course, this decision further encumbers remittances and savings as money is necessary to meet daily needs.

A second concern rooted in part in the growth of migration in rural Oaxaca is increased class stratification that is occurring in these communities. Villages in rural Oaxaca have never been homogenous, rather they are marked by social and socio-economic divisions that are defined by wealth, status and family history. These divisions are growing more pronounced as some households benefit from an ability to migrate while others find their status declining in relation. Non-migrating households, particularly those that cannot participate in internal or cross-border movements because of a lack of resources, find themselves impoverished as community governments demand increasing monetary support from families, and as market goods become more ubiquitous within peasant and indigenous communities. Typically, households in these situations must find ways to survive in an economy that is becoming more monetized. For some individuals, work as “fill-ins” for migrants creates the only opportunity available. Others find minimal wage labor (often as unskilled laborers) earning on average about \$15.00 a week locally or in a nearby town. Those households with migrant aged members may chose to go into debt to move a member across the border. During 2001, some households reported spending upwards of \$5,000 to cover expenses. These costs add another burden to the household as it struggles to cover loans that often have high interest rates.

Disappearing children and relatives, land speculation, and increasing economic inequality are all forces that (among others) destabilize rural Oaxacan households. In response, there are growing problems with domestic violence and alcoholism as families cope (or collapse). In nearly every community visited for this project, my team and I have met families that are saddened or angry about their losses. There are

elderly who look on almost in a daze and ask where they fit in this new and changing world.

There are also unanticipated positives in addition to those noted in the body of this paper. In most of the communities, women are moving into positions as leaders, as the traditional male dominance of local government must respond to the vagaries of migration schedules. There is also a growing understanding of the costs and burdens migration places on those family members who are left behind (as exemplified in Santa Gertrudes' program to buy chickens for single mothers). Thus, the outcomes of migration are mixed and depend largely on the status and ability of the households and communities involved. For wealthy, well established households, migration can be a tool to future success. Unfortunately, for struggling households, migration (and in point of fact, the globalization of the local economic system) often signal additional burdens for the future.

Discussion

I began this paper by suggesting instead of asking why migration destroys local cultural systems, we might just as well ask why do communities continue to function given the stresses that come with migration and related social changes. The answer I have offered in this paper lies in understanding the ways in which rural Oaxacans effectively use networks and social ties in sending communities, receiving communities and the transnational space that bridges the two ends of the migration cycle.

The social outcome of the migration and remittance use (among other transnational processes) is not necessarily the decline of community at the cost of sociability and solidarity that traditional models in the social sciences might predict (Redfield 1960; Tönnies 1988). Rather, the outcome is in line with Kearney's reconceptualization of the peasant community as one part of a series of "social and communication networks" in which individuals of varying potential participate (1996:124). Potentials are further defined by the resources available to the individual through space, time and structures including the household and community. Thus, the migrant household that pools resources creates one set of possibilities, while the non-migrant household creates another. Those migrants who opt out of their households and sever network ties create yet a third possibility. It is from these possibilities, not through an essential list of qualities, that the community is created and recreated. At this point, the networks that define the experiences for most rural Oaxacan migrants have the potential to extend into the foreseeable future as the population continues to cope with a world limited by economic constraints.

Conclusions

I have sought to show some of the positive outcomes of the growth of migration for rural communities in central Oaxaca. I have done so without losing sight of the costs involved in migration, but also not focusing overly harshly on those costs. I argue we should likely expect declines in social cohesion and cultural traditions as migration pressures mount. Nevertheless, I show how rural Oaxacans maintain cohesive patterns of association. What the examples from Oaxaca illustrate, are some of the new ways in

which we must approach migration studies. First, particularly in anthropology, we must move away from strict readings of cultural traditions and beyond essentialistic models of societies. In other words, we need to focus on how traditions are used to respond to change rather than a focus on measuring how traditions change in relation to some moment in the past. Second, we need to be concerned both with place and process. Here what I mean is that we cannot focus entirely on “transnational” outcomes. We need to understand how geography, local processes (work for example) and local moves are organized with transnational migrations, even when the outcomes are perhaps far from what the people involved originally envisioned in their decision making. Third, we need to place the migrant into his or her social world. We can talk about migrants as individuals and decisions makers, but we need to better understand the outcomes of those decisions for the households and communities that count the migrants as members. Finally, we need to understand how sending communities continue to play roles in the outcomes of migration and remittance use even for receiving communities and migrants who have been absent from their natal homes for years and perhaps generations. Often in the discussion of transnational outcomes, there is a sense that the migrant is neither here nor there. It is as if he or she lives in an ethereal plan between poles. The reality for most Oaxacans is something quite different. Migrants are rooted locally, but in localities that transcend a single home. The challenge for our future is to describe these outcomes, but to do so in a comprehensive way.

Notes

1. This approach is an alternative to those specialists who examine migration at the level of the individual decision maker (a micro-focus) or state (a macro-focus). When viewed as the decision of an individual, or aggregated around national statistics, it is difficult to understand the role of the community and intra community variability play movement, remittance use outcomes and so forth. I do not deny the importance of the individual actor in the process of migration and remittance uses (and certainly the skill and talents of the individual has a bearing on the outcomes), nor should we look past national patterns of movement. However, even when the individual migrates to escape his or her family, the decision has an effect on the domestic unit or household, and an emphasis on national patterns often misses what are important regional and local differences.
2. The 13 municipios selected for study came from a randomized list of central valleys municipios organized by Martha Rees. In addition, I added the municipio of Santa Ana del Valle, where I have worked since 1992. Three communities from Rees’ list were randomly replaced due to the presence of other social scientists; lack of a direct road to a major local highway and finally, one municipio had become part of Oaxaca City as the city expanded into the surrounding valleys. The municipios are not evenly divided between the three valleys. Instead, there are 4 municipios in the north: Guadalupe Etla, San Jose del Estado, San Juan Bautista Jayacatlan and San Pablo Huitzo; 6 are to the east: Santa Maria Guelace, San Juan Guelavia, Santa Ana del Valle, Diaz Ordaz, San Juan del Rio and San Lorenzo Albarradas; and 3 are to the south: San Pedro Ixtlahuaca, San Martin Tilcajete and Santa Inez Yatzeche.
3. INEGI estimates the total number of Oaxacans living outside of the state and in other states or countries at just over 7%, this is well below the average for the nation 19.39%, and states like Morelos where over 30% of the state’s population has relocated internally and externally (INEGI 2001).
4. Not all migrants were able to recall the year of their first sojourns to other parts of Mexico or the U.S.. Age at first migration could be identified for 132 households. Among these households, the

average age at first migration was just under 35 years. However, the modal age was 25. Two of the oldest migrants in the sample were migrating for social rather than economic reasons and were in their late 60s. These individuals left their villages as tourists intending to visit children and grandchildren living in California. On the other hand, one of the younger migrants identified (8 years at first migration) went to Mexico City with his father in 1960, and has continued to travel between his hometown of Guadalupe Etla and Mexico City throughout his life.

5. This is the “cumulative effect” of migration. As movement grows more common, the costs and risks decline and therefore a more diverse pool of migrants are able to move. It is one of the reasons we find “enclaves” in the U.S. that include members of one sending community (see Massey 1990).

6. The municipio of Santa Maria Guelace also has a large migrant community in Pougkeepsie.

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